

Implementing a Research Agenda for National Heritage Areas: The Next Steps

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A Report on the Workshop



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I. Presentations

-**Nora Mitchell** described the activities of the Conservation Study Institute, an academic arm of the National Park Service, which furthers leadership in cultural conservation through publications, programs and conferences. Mitchell discussed the contributions of **international exchange** to advancing the heritage area research agenda. The CSI is:

- exploring documenting international experiences
- interviewing practitioners and encouraging peer dialogue
- formulating a strategy for gathering case studies on international exchange.

-**Adrian Phillips** made an insightful observation:

- We must differentiate **"learning"** and **"research"**
- We need a learning agenda.**

This country's heritage movement is not alone; we can learn from international examples that address rural crisis, globalization, post-industrial landscapes and communities under threat. Heritage is a tool to address these issues. Phillips suggested the benefits and visibility of a National Heritage Area as a World Heritage Site. For information on the concepts of the IUCN toward protected areas, see www.IUCN.org.

-**Steve Selin** represents the 2-years old Appalachian Forest Heritage Area, funded by the Rural America Program. He described an article being submitted for publication on the **dynamics of a heritage area start-up**. Case studies and participant evaluations are shaping a profile of heritage area partners, visions, benefits, issues and conflicts.

-**Van West** spoke about an **institutional survey** distributed by the Tennessee Civil War National Heritage Area to a range of publicly accessible sites. The results revealed a higher visitation and volunteer participation rate than anticipated. The findings of surveys of this type can be used to **shape future capacity-building** efforts.

-**Tom Guthrie**, a doctoral student at University of Chicago who is studying the Northern Rio Grande Region, questioned the prospects and implications of the heritage area model on heritage preservation and on local communities. Do the stories being told as a result of heritage initiatives truly reflect the history of the local people? In the process, **are we transforming heritage?** These fundamental questions about heritage are imperative to our understanding of what we are trying to accomplish.

A dynamic discussion on the politics of conservation and multiculturalism ensued. **We lack clear consensus on cultural policy and the concept of heritage.** The group debated heritage as a construct, about conflicting values in cultural landscapes, and about the implications of assigning a new cultural identity to people and places. Are we commodifying heritage? It may be time for us to question these things.



II. Brainstorming

Elizabeth Watson facilitated the second half of the session, which was meant to clarify our needs and goals, and highlighted subjects for further exploration. Participants clarified goals outlined in the first workshop by contributing the following thoughts:

Definitions

- As we further define our research goals, we need some **common definitions**.
 - What do we mean by economic sustainability?
 - Livability index to measure social capital and civic engagement
- Benchmarking—we can't track indicators well without first **defining what success means**.

Goals

- Clarify and question what's needed—what are the goals? What do we need to understand?
 - differentiate between **long and short term goals** and studies.
 - Goals should include longitudinal projects that we revisit every five years
 - Baseline interviews with community members, review every 5 years
- ICOMOS' Limits of Acceptable Change: baseline guidelines for measuring change and indicating rate of change
- An EIS costs \$\$ and can provide a phony alternative to what's needed

- Contingent valuation—quality of life studies
- Focus groups can explore issues of social value—what to protect—what to value and research
 - Visioning must be Intergenerational and inclusive

There must be ongoing questioning and exploration

The broader picture

- We need to measure heritage areas against **a backdrop—a model**
- Chart heritage area development against other trends—internationally or thematically
- What can we learn from other models to improve our own process and coordination? What are these models?
- Tourism as a discipline is different in the US versus the rest of the world—we can learn from the international model

Models

- Look at **evolution of plans**
 - We've paid significant attention to significance—pay attention to evolution
 - Benchmarking
- Look at **implementation**
 - Strategic plans, business plans
- Look at variations in **management entity**
 - In governing style, relationship with NPS, in organizations' evolution
- Look at **management models**
 - Range of models, legal framework and variation
 - What works?
 - We have improved significantly—what is the evolution?
 - What is our hypothesis about what works? What theories are we testing?
- Look at **Region and place**— context is critical to a model's success

What is the theory of the NHA?

- Is there really a trend?
- What is the history of heritage development?
- What is the cultural heritage paradigm, and what does it mean?
- What are the influences of market forces?

Exchange of information

- Basic framework for a **clearinghouse** needed, without analysis
- Portal under development—NPS Federal Preservation Institute—Connie Ramirez
- List-serve?
- Should we form a coalition?

Capacity-building – public and academic/ professional

- What works to develop capacity?

- Missing: **outreach to society**
- Exchanges and twinning, sister cities
- We need a publication--moving beyond the brochure to stories
 - Highlight changed lives

Public and civic investment

- Ford and Pew? Getty Conservation Institute? Corporate partners?
- Partners for Livable Communities
- Link with other organizations are doing research, i.e., Americans for the Arts, regional humanities centers (see list)

Alliance for National Heritage Areas (ANHA) activities

- ANHA ready to decide on a “selection” of indicators
- A best-practices booklet

III. “To Do” list

The big picture:

1. Improve our understanding of what heritage areas are all about
2. Develop capacity
3. Advocate for the concept of heritage areas
4. Assess and share what we are doing

Implementation strategies:

1. Create gateway or clearinghouse to exchange info--share research and learning
2. Collect, study and analyze management models
3. Analyze state models, business models, EIS rules of engagement—circulate observations
4. Raise money for heritage areas booklet—best practices, how-to, et cetera
5. Create stronger international networks—share insights with others